

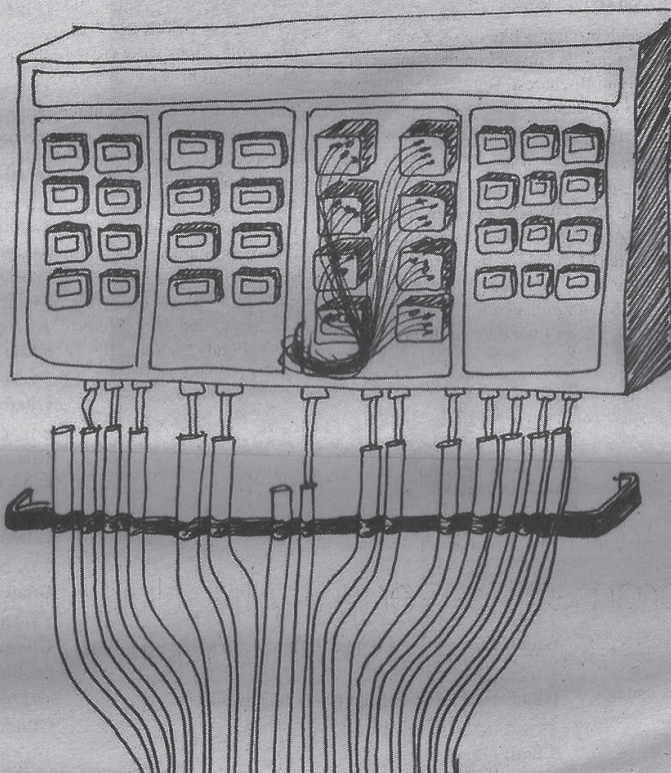
A New Space in Bucharest

by cristiane bouger

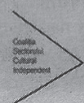
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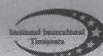
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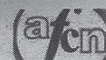
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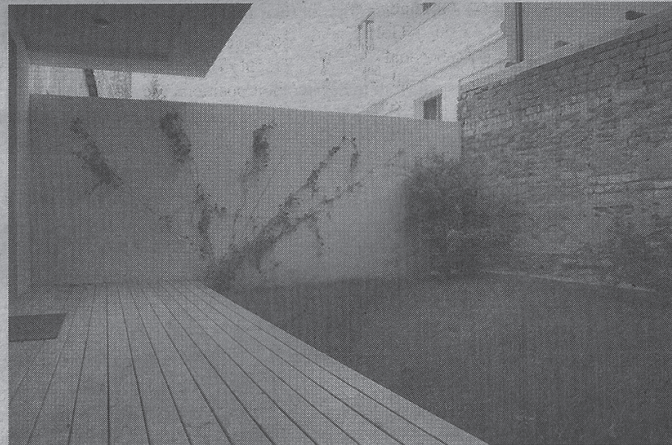
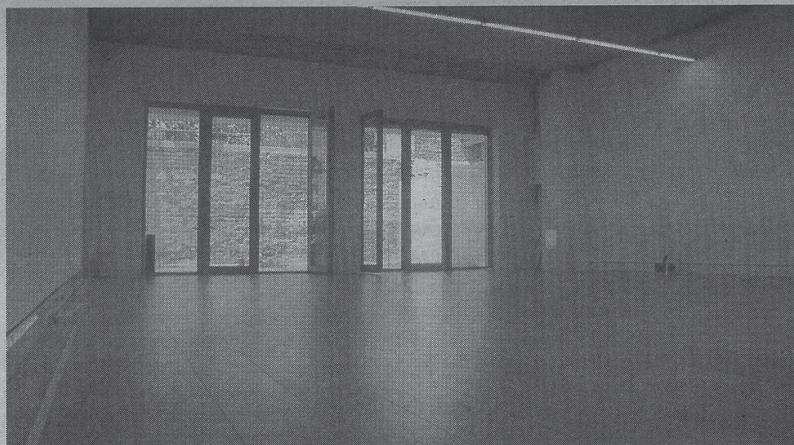
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FLYER FOR COALITION OF THE INDEPENDENT CULTURAL SECTOR



PHOTOS: © ZONAD SERIAL PARADISE STUDIO/COSMIN MANOLESCU



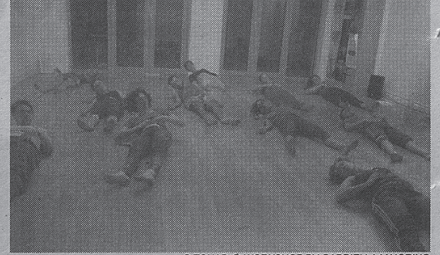
© ZONAD SERIAL PARADISE STUDIO/ ZONAD FILM - PREMIERE OF THE FILM 'MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ - THE ARTIST IS PRESENT'



© ZONAD @ IMPRO - JAM SESSION



© ZONAD @ LECTURE BY ALEXANDRA PIRICI



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Contemporary dance is an art form that struggles to survive in Romania. During the communist regime it was regarded as an illicit art form, transmitted only in clandestine classes. In recent years, the problems have shifted; dance artists face the political omission of their field, abrupt changes in cultural policy, and cuts in funding.

In this hostile environment, ZonaD - Serial Paradise Studio was founded in Bucharest by choreographer and Gabriela Tudor Foundation Executive Director Cosmin Manolescu along with Stefania Ferchedau, former Romanian Cultural Institute New York Events Coordinator. The new space for experimental dance was conceived to be the studio for Manolescu's Serial Paradise Company, as well as a laboratory for contemporary arts. It offers space for

and the George Apostu Cultural Centre in Bacau. ArtistNe(s)t was initiated in 2006 by the visionary Romanian arts manager Gabriela Tudor (1957-2009) and has since hosted more than 20 choreographers from several countries.

Through programs like these, ZonaD has made a positive impact on the dance community in Bucharest. But the studio-laboratory is an island in a quite stagnant scene.

The critical situation for the arts in the country was exacerbated by an emergency decree from Prime Minister Victor Ponta in June 2012. Without previous debate, Ponta declared that the Romanian Cultural Institute (RCI), which formerly responded directly to the Presidency of Romania, would be subordinated to the Senate. As a result, the RCI would operate under

choreographers and dancers. The National Center of Dance Bucharest (Centrul National al Dansului București-CNDB) lost its space in 2011, and dance artists are deprived of any kind of continuous support. For contemporary dance, the discouraging results were evident in 2012, when only two productions were created in Bucharest over the entire year.

This is a difficult environment for a dance space like ZonaD to survive in. Thus far, the space has benefited from funding from the National Center of Dance Bucharest and the Romanian Cultural Institute. However, prospects for long-term financial support are non-existent. Manolescu's goal is to secure support for a full year's programming, but currently funds in Romania are granted only on a project-by-project basis. Funds available for Romanian cho-

reographers and dancers in Romania, that details the importance of a live, emerging, and dynamic culture, as well as statistics on the Ministry of Culture's drastic budget cuts since 2010.

In consideration of Prime Minister Victor Ponta's victory in the 2012 election, Manolescu reflects on the prospects for the adoption of the Coalition proposal: "It is hard to say if the new government led by Mr. Ponta will support the proposal made by the Coalition of the Independent Cultural Sector," he states. "It is very much unlikely as it was already announced as an important part of the culture budget cut in 2013."

Gloom pervades not only the dance scene, but also the Romanian population at large. People are weary of the implementation of

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rehearsals; hosts residencies, workshops and festivals; and presents dance programs, lectures, movie sessions, improvisation and live music.

Since it opened in June 2012, ZonaD has been a hub of activity. Recent events include the Bucharest premiere of Matthew Akers' film *Marina Abramović - The Artist is Present*, and the monthly ZonaD Impro, a series of open jam sessions conducted by Manolescu and the musician Golcea Vlaicu. Through April 2013, ZonaD will be hosting the festival E-Motional Bodies & Cities, a European dance exchange program for artists and dance managers developed in partnership with Romania, Cyprus, Ireland, Latvia, United Kingdom, and Turkey. Facilitated by Manolescu, the program offers mobility grants and co-produces performances with the goal of bringing artists into "new cultural landscapes" and connecting them to these respective geo-political contexts. From May 12-June 9, ZonaD will host the ArtistNe(s)t Residency, in which American dancers and choreographers will collaborate with Romanian artists and develop work at ZonaD

partisan political decisions. Furthermore, it would now only support programs dedicated to the preservation of Romanian identity. Emerging artists or experimental art forms developed outside of the Romanian Diaspora would no longer be eligible for funding.

Following Ponta's announcement, one-third of RCI's annual budget was cut, and planned programs for the upcoming years were suspended. These radical changes led RCI-New York Director Corina Suteu and Deputy Director Oana Radu to resign from their positions in November 2012.

This new policy limits the scope in which knowledge, taste and reflection can be developed. It also brings up critical questions that extend beyond those of aesthetic preference.

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The new politics further stress what was already a taxing situation for Romanian

choreographers usually do not exceed €2,000 for contemporary dance productions and €5,000 for dance festivals. These mixed funds—coming both from private and governmental sources—cannot be spent toward general operating expenses like rent and space maintenance, making the work of a small contemporary arts organization even harder. Without additional outside support, the possibilities to make a cultural impact with these grants diminish considerably.

In view of the fact that working abroad is currently the only option for the development of Romanian contemporary dance makers, Manolescu strongly believes that artists must effect political change. "The cultural sector needs an immediate reform and a healthier political system," he says.

An activist consortium called the Coalition of the Independent Cultural Sector was formed in 2010 by eight organizations and since joined by over 250 artists. Recent efforts focused on the December 2012 parliamentary elections. The Coalition lobbied for increased funding for independent artists and small companies. It created a 47-page document, sent to all political par-

ties and disillusioned with their leaders and the country's endemic political corruption. Nevertheless, artists keep contemporary discourse flowing, occupying the neglected spaces and edges of uncertainty.

To learn more:

www.e-motional.eu

www.artistnest.ro

<http://zonadstudio.wordpress.com/english>

CRISTIANE BOUGER develops work in the fields of performance, installation, experimental theater, video and critical writing to engage in a discourse intertwining body, biography, culture and politics. She is a 2012 Movement Research Artist-in-Residence and a *Performa Magazine* Writer-in-Residence. www.critianebouger.com